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216 Rescued Indian Star Tortoises Released into Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve

25 August 2026 ·

ENVIRONMENT

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

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216 Rescued Indian Star Tortoises Released into Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve

25 August 2026 · 5 min read ·

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

216 Indian Star Tortoises, seized in law-enforcement operations against wildlife traffickers and rescued in separate interventions in Mumbai and Thane, were released in batches into designated forest ranges of the **Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve**, Chandrapur district, Maharashtra, on **August 23, 2026**.

THE OPERATION

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Number of tortoises	216
Source of seizure	Mumbai and Thane
Distance transported	Over 800 km
Mode	Specialised wildlife ambulance
Executing team	10-member team of the Maharashtra Forest Department (Mumbai Range) and RAWW
Release site	Designated forest ranges, Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve

RAWW is the Resqink Association for Wildlife Welfare. The release followed conservation protocols including a scientifically determined sex ratio across the released batches.

THE SPECIES

The **Indian Star Tortoise (Geochelone elegans)** takes its name from the radiating star-shaped patterns on its carapace scutes, which function as disruptive camouflage in dry grassland.

ATTRIBUTE	DETAIL
Scientific name	Geochelone elegans
Habitat	Dry scrub, thorn forest and grassland
Range	Peninsular India, Sri Lanka, parts of Pakistan
IUCN Red List status	Vulnerable
CITES listing	Appendix I
Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972	Schedule I

The CITES Uplisting

The Indian Star Tortoise was **uplisted from CITES Appendix II to Appendix I at CoP18, held in Geneva in 2019**, on a proposal co-sponsored by India. The distinction is examination-relevant:

- **Appendix I** covers species threatened with extinction; commercial international trade is prohibited.
- **Appendix II** covers species that may become threatened unless trade is controlled; trade is permitted with a permit.

It is among the **most heavily trafficked tortoises in the world**, driven by demand in the exotic pet trade in Southeast and East Asia. Its docility, small size and distinctive markings are precisely what make it commercially attractive and therefore vulnerable.

The 2022 Amendment to the Wild Life (Protection) Act

The **Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022** restructured the schedules of the 1972 Act:

- Schedules reduced from **six to four**
- **Schedule I:** species with the highest protection
- **Schedule II:** species with lesser protection
- **Schedule III:** protected plants
- **Schedule IV:** a new schedule listing CITES-scheduled specimens, inserted to give domestic effect to India's CITES obligations

TADOBA-ANDHARI TIGER RESERVE

ATTRIBUTE	DETAIL
Location	Chandrapur district, Maharashtra
Distinction	Maharashtra's oldest national park
Tadoba notified as national park	1955
Andhari Wildlife Sanctuary added	1986
Declared a tiger reserve	1993-94
Biogeographic zone	Deccan Peninsula, Central Highlands

Project Tiger was launched on **April 1, 1973**. The **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** was given **statutory** status in **2006** through an amendment to the Wild Life (Protection) Act, following the Tiger Task Force report.

THE ENFORCEMENT INSTITUTIONS

BODY	ESTABLISHED	ROLE
Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB)	2007, under the WLPA; HQ New Delhi	Coordinates wildlife crime enforcement
National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)	Statutory since 2006	Tiger reserve oversight
TRAFFIC India	Non-governmental	Wildlife trade monitoring

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Seizure is the easy half of wildlife-crime enforcement. The hard half is post-seizure disposal. India has limited accredited rescue and **rehabilitation** capacity, and confiscated live animals frequently die in holding while legal proceedings run. A structured repatriation of 216 animals to a protected area is therefore the exception rather than the norm, and that is precisely why it is newsworthy.

The scientific caution must be stated honestly. Releasing confiscated animals of unknown **provenance** carries real ecological risk:

- **Genetic concerns.** Star tortoises show regional genetic structure. Releasing animals from an unknown source population into a distant one can blur locally adapted lineages.

- **Disease transmission.** Animals held in trafficking conditions are exposed to pathogens they would not encounter in the wild, and can introduce them to resident populations.
- **Range appropriateness.** Best practice under IUCN guidelines requires provenance determination, ideally genetic, followed by quarantine, health screening and release **within the source population's range**.

None of this argues against release. It argues that the conservation value of such an operation depends on the screening protocols behind it, which is the question an examination answer should raise rather than assume.

The enforcement gap. The Star Tortoise trade is a low-risk, high-volume crime. Penalties under the Wild Life (Protection) Act are seldom applied at deterrent levels, and courier and e-commerce channels remain weakly policed relative to their role in moving small live animals.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3 (Environment): Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; biodiversity; environmental legislation.

Prelims focus: *Geochelone elegans*, its IUCN status and CITES appendix; the year and venue of the CITES uplisting; the schedule restructuring under the 2022 amendment; Tadoba's notification years; Project Tiger's launch date; WCCB's founding year.

Mains angle: Use this to argue that **wildlife crime enforcement is judged at the point of disposal, not the point of seizure**. A seizure that ends in animals dying in custody is an enforcement failure recorded as a success. Connect this to India's institutional capacity gap in rescue centres and wildlife forensics.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

THE OPERATION:

216 Indian Star Tortoises released, August 23, 2026

Seized in Mumbai and Thane; transported over 800 km by specialised wildlife ambulance

Executed by a 10-member Maharashtra Forest Department (Mumbai Range) and RAWW team

RAWW: Resqink Association for Wildlife Welfare

INDIAN STAR TORTOISE:

Scientific name: *Geochelone elegans*

IUCN Red List: Vulnerable

CITES: Appendix I, uplisted from Appendix II at CoP18, Geneva, 2019, on a proposal co-sponsored by India

Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I

Range: peninsular India, Sri Lanka, parts of Pakistan; dry scrub and grassland habitat

WILD LIFE (PROTECTION) AMENDMENT ACT, 2022:

Reduced schedules from six to four

Schedule I: highest protection; Schedule II: lesser protection; Schedule III: plants; Schedule IV: CITES-listed specimens

TADOBA-ANDHARI TIGER RESERVE:

Chandrapur district, Maharashtra; the State's oldest national park (Gugamal is the largest by area)

Tadoba notified a national park in 1955; Andhari Wildlife Sanctuary added 1986; tiger reserve in 1993-94

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Project Tiger launched: April 1, 1973

NTCA became statutory: 2006

Wildlife Crime Control Bureau established: 2007, headquartered in New Delhi

CITES Appendix I prohibits commercial international trade; Appendix II permits regulated trade

Sources: *ThePrint*, *NTCA*, *CITES*

Source: 216 Rescued Indian Star Tortoises Released into Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

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